

JOHNNY GERALDY

Fear and Fire and a
Man and a Maid.

By Bernice Brown

JOHNNY Gerald was born in one of those nameless lumber villages up along the St. Lawrence. His father was a Frenchman, powerfully built, as the Frenchman in the colonies seems often to be—blunt, unimaginative, tremendous physical endurance. Marie Tremont, whom he married, was of another planet.

Marie was afraid of the wind in the forest, the hoot of the night owl, of the evil spirit that made the flame flicker in the lantern and the puncheon creek when no one stepped upon them. During the long days when she was left in the cabin she conjured up calamities that might overtake her—the timber wolves might come, a marauding band of Indians, fever, but most often of all that ghost that stalks every woodsman—fire.

Johnny Gerald grew up to look like his father. His shoulders were broad and his hands were large and his eyes were set far apart. He could swing an axe and, with the best of his fellows, trek the long miles to the northward. True, Johnny Gerald was the son of a pioneer, but he was also the son of his mother, who was afraid when the puncheon cracked and who woke up at night with the smell of wood smoke in her nostrils. As the peasant people say, he prayed nothing would ever happen that would make patent to all the world the thing that was so pitifully known to him.

It was the last of October, and Devil's Creek liked its way like a tongue of fire between the banks. It was difficult to remember how, after the spring rains set in, the creek bed a river down which the Tamarac people floated the winter cut to the mills at Pierre Fonds, for till the rains came there was never a man who could run that stream in a boat.

"It's the devil's own creek," said Jacques Moreau, "and whoever would run it safely must first give his soul over outright, and then never lift a paddle."

That seemed to be the way of it, but what man would have the courage to sit stark in his canoe and trust even the Angel Gabriel to lead him over the rapids and safe to the lake at Grandes Forets, where Devil's Creek snuffed out?

Grandes Forets was the outfitting village from which the Tamarac lumber crew set out. They left their heavy tools were in, and they did not come back until April, when they floated the black logs down to Pierre Fonds.

In Grandes Forets there were stores and a school and a church. Every man had a sweetheart there, and there were dances sometimes in the tavern, where old Jacques played the fiddle. Every man ached to get back home to a pretty face and a home-cooked stew and a warm blanket as he wanted. Even Johnny Gerald dreamed, though he had never breathed a word to Jeanne Beaumont.

Before he tramped back that night to the shack, he strolled down the cedar in the lee of a shelter stood a slender birchbark canoe. Johnny Gerald glanced at it idly. He wondered whether it would not be safer in the cabin. Not for six long months could a man use it. It would be sure death now. Oh, well, he would bring it up tomorrow. Then he trudged along back to the shack. The room was heavy with wood smoke, for the fire in the fireplace was a bad one. Johnny Gerald, even smoke from a tame old fireplace with three men to watch it. It made him feel strange and ill, and his heart stumbled fast in his breast—but, then, that was because he was marked.

This was the first year that Johnny Gerald had come up early. It was a promotion, of course, to be made a cruiser, to be sent on ahead to blaze the tract that would be cut that winter.

But meant going up alone into that forest, hearing all day and all night the sound of the wind in the branches; never seeing the sun. It does terrible things to a man if he's not forest broken. Only a tough fiber can stand against it. Jean Rebolt was a good woodsman because he was a dullard, and Peter Lafferte because he was a devil-may-care. Johnny was neither of these.

At the company shack in the timber Jean and Peter joined him. They had come up ahead with provisions, brought ardently over the narrow trail northward. They brought him news of how old Jacques Duval was having all the village in to revel at the tavern the night before the loggers were to leave.

"Tomorrow it is," Peter said. "A gorse to be here in the timber that night." He threw another log of pine into the fire and watched how the flame sprang up to meet it, and how the needles writhed back in the heat. "That's the way the whole woods would burn," he said. "The trail up is slippery with needles and dry as tinder."

They ate their supper on the rough deal table, in the heavy light of the lantern. Jean Rebolt kicked a log on the hearth. "Sit will smoke tonight," he grumbled, "for the wind's from the east."

Then they rolled their blankets around them and lay down in the narrow bunks to sleep. In a twinkling there was no sound in the shack except the deep, even breathing of healthful fatigue and the soft falling of ashes on the stones of the hearth.

JOHNNY GERALDY never knew what time it was when he was awakened. Suddenly he was sitting bolt upright, his heart pounding like a woodchuck in a trap, his eyes staring full into the darkness, and the smell of wood smoke in his nostrils. This was fire, just as Peter Lafferte had predicted. How the woods would go on a night like this!

Without any act of volition Johnny Gerald got out of bed and tiptoed to the door, and the latch did not click as he closed the door after him. Then he found himself running down the path to the creek. There was no way to escape, only one, and that was by water by Devil's creek. In the canoe under the cedars, Jean Rebolt and Peter Lafferte could burn up to a cinder back there in the cabin. Johnny Gerald did not stop to give them warning.

Dashed with fear, Johnny Gerald plunged into the thicket. Then his head struck something. He could see no longer. With a strange new sense he groped his way until his hands found what they were seeking, then he dragged the birchbark shell down to the water. All around him he could hear its hooting. Like a seal he slid his body into the canoe, and he lay down flat on his stomach. He was blind as a bat, but it didn't matter down there in the darkness. He was moving out now, very rapidly. It seemed as though he had leaned his ear against the heart of the river. He could hear the things grind under him, and shudder and tremble. He was tossed from side to side; he was plunged head foremost.

He had no idea of time any more, as he lay on his face in the shallow bark, his blind eyes shut fast against the blackness.

It was dawn when he finally came to. He was swinging gently, for there was no current. Very slowly he turned over. There was light against his eyeballs. Finally he opened his eyes and saw the gray sky overhead and the thin gray clouds of early morning scudding over it.

He could see. At last he sat up straight. Before him lay the village, built up against the wall of forest. It was as peaceful as a Sunday. All at once he thought of the forest fire—that awful thing from which he had fled. But the horizon was clear and the air was fresh with the morning sharpness. Slowly his thoughts groped back to his awakening and his stealing out of the cabin. He had left the others in there—to die for all he cared—and he had escaped in the canoe.

Rudi Agatin saw Johnny Gerald as he walked up the street of the village. He looked at him blankly. "Name of a name!" he said; "or do I dream? But how are you here?" he demanded.

"By the Devil's Creek way," he said. "Name of a name!" the old man repeated. "You have come back for the gayest tonight. You have come back to watch Jeanne Beaumont. Man," he said, "you must have drowned your wits before starting. But you have done something no man has ever done before."

Inside of thirty minutes Rudi Agatin had told all the village how Johnny Gerald was there and how he had come down Devil's Creek in the night time. And all the people stared at Johnny Gerald, and the children, following him around the street at a distance, silently, whispering.

That night he went up to the tavern. He had not wanted to go, but it seemed, somehow, a part of this strange role he found himself playing. Jacques Duval saw Johnny Gerald as he stood a moment silent at the threshold.

"Bravo!" he cried. "It is Johnny Gerald, and he has come down the Devil's Creek alone in the night time. We will drink him a toast in his honor."

Then they passed around a pitcher of applejack, and every one drank and cheered, but everybody looked at him a little strangely. It was uncanny, that thing he had done.

Late that evening, Jeanne Beaumont sat down on the bench beside him. "Man alive," she said, "that was a crazy thing to do. But I cannot but look up to you with admiration."

She looked at him as a woman does who is convinced against her instincts of the quality of a man. It was a mixture of reluctant admiration and atonement. She had wronged him in her thoughts. "Johnny Gerald," she said, "you are a brave man. When you go back to the woods again I have something for you to take with you, a charm that is very effective against cuts and chilblains."

That night he walked up the road beside her to her father's cottage. She had never seemed so little before, or so yielding—or so unattainable. They stopped before the white gate that shut off the withered garden.

"Good-by," he said. "I am going back tomorrow—over the trail by Pierre way."

"Oh—" she said; then, after a moment: "You will be back in the spring with the others?"

"No," he said; "I go north still farther to blaze the tract for the cut next fall."

She went into the cottage and brought him out the tiny figure of St. Anthony that held a charm against cuts and chilblains. "Keep this by you," she said. "Not but what St. Anthony himself seems to go beside you. St. Anthony," she laughed, "—the devil."

She turned her face up toward him in the moonlight. "Good-by," he said.

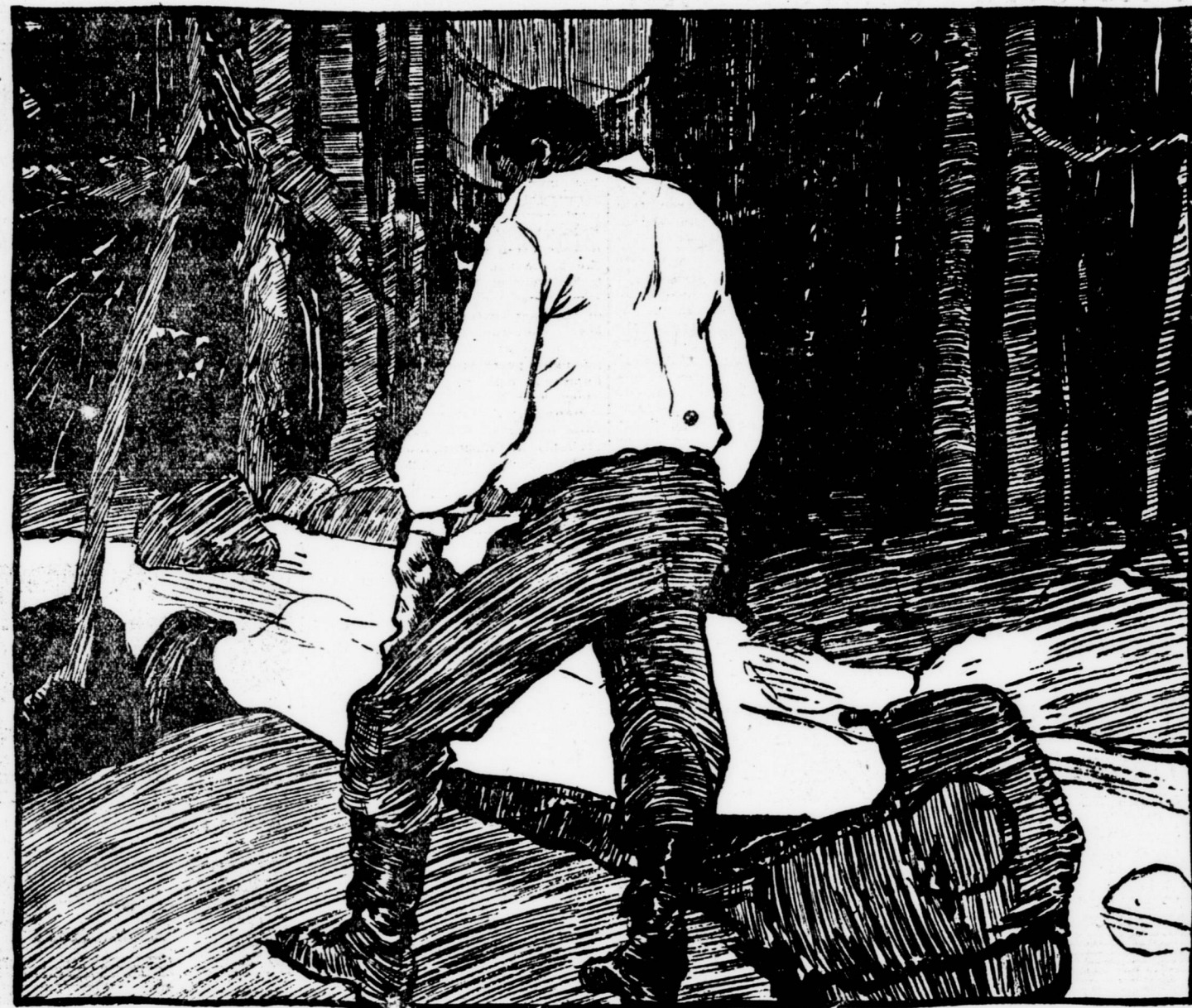
In that moment he knew she was waiting for him, as he had never dared dream she would—because he had done a brave thing.

"Good-by," he said—and he was gone.

Next day he started up the trail before sunrise. He was alone again under the twilight of the spruce. He hated it here in the forest. It played such tricks on you. It had drugged him and blinded him and made him mad—and he had done something in that madness that had turned him into a great man. Jeanne Beaumont had lifted her face to him in the moonlight because she had thought him brave. But up here in the forest he had left two men to be burned to death. He had gone off and left them without a warning because he was at heart a coward.

"Oh, God! Oh, God!" he whispered, and his hand closed around the tiny figure of St. Anthony that held a charm against cuts and chilblains. The long winter passed and spring came, swelling Devil's creek to a river, and summer came and fall. Johnny Gerald went through the routine of the days as he always had. The men he worked with had always thought him a little stand-offish, but now he had become even more a man apart.

ANOTHER year passed and another, and the Johnny Gerald story had become a legend. People began to hear about him in other villages. The men of Grandes Forets made up



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splendid exploits for him. He could swim a league under water. He could strangle a mountain wildcat with one hand behind him. He could tramp for seven hours without food or sleep or water. Jeanne Beaumont watched him now with a strange look in her eyes, for it seemed that Johnny Gerald would never come any nearer with a question than the yearning that was forever in his eyes.

Jeanne Beaumont once laid her hand on his arm and looked up at him gravely. "Why do you shut us all out?" she said. "You are too much alone. You are lonely."

"Why do you shut us out?" she demanded. "It was a long moment before he answered, and his eyes stared ahead into blankness. 'You would not come in if you knew.'"

At dawn Johnny Gerald fell into a heavy sleep. He was dreaming when old Peter shook his shoulder. Johnny Gerald snuffed at the air as he had been commanded.

"You smell, then, nothing?" Peter's face was eager with longing for a denial.

"Yes," Johnny answered. "Yes," he said. "It is a long moment before Johnny Gerald answered. 'Yes,' he said."

PETER LAFFERTE stood up and pushed open the door of the shack. "It is due east," he said. "The trail north would miss it. The two men stood there a moment in silence."

"Yes," Johnny said, the cold north wind missed it. There was one thing neither had said to the other, but that thing was more real than the peril of the moment. Finally old Peter raised his eyes to Johnny Gerald.

"It is each man's right to decide just how sweet life is to him." He stopped a moment. There was no doubting the humility of his appeal. "But you did it once," he said finally.

"—you did it on a wager to take a girl to a dance. Now the village lies in the track of the east wind, and the east wind is faster than a man on horseback!" Already the little animals scurried out from the underbrush, gophers and chipmunks and squirrels and foxes. "See," he said, "they are flying, but they will not be fast enough. There is only one way to get the news to the village. One way."

Johnny Gerald did not move. It seemed as though he had become rooted to that spot. "You are the only man who could do this," the old man spoke the words with the calmness of conviction. "You are the bravest man in Grandes Forets. You can now become his savior."

Still Johnny Gerald did not move. At last he came the moment he had prayed all his life would never arrive, that terrible moment when a man must show to his fellows his soul. "Peter Lafferte," he said, "I am not a brave man. That was luck, that other time. Just luck. It was a mistake, an accident that I went at all. This time, if I go, it is deliberate. It is death."

Peter looked at him and shook his head. "A man doesn't do a thing like that by accident. Don't try to fool with me," he said. "I am an old man, and there are some things that I know."

So Peter Lafferte did not believe him, either! Old Peter started down the path to Devil's creek. The canoe was in a shelter near the stream, holed away until the floods of April. Peter pushed back the underbrush and pulled it out. Johnny Gerald watched him, but he made no move to help. He was like a man who has seen the gallows lifted for him, black against the sky. At the edge of the stream Peter Lafferte dropped the birch bark.

"If you don't get there," said old Peter, "I shall tell all the world what you attempted. If you do get there—his lips drew into a cruel smile—"you will tell all the world it was 'just by accident, just luck.'"

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Johnny Gerald made no answer. Jeanne Beaumont had not believed him, and he had told her the truth. How much less would this striping. "No two men fear alike," he said finally.

That night Peter Lafferte lifted his finger to the dog star. "Look," he said, "we will have a big winter tomorrow."

This time the old fellow's prophecy came true. Indeed, it did not wait until morning. With the sunset the wind set in. All night it bent the branches westward. It sounded like the rush of water. Like the tide, too, the gale came out of nothing and swept onward into nothing.

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It seemed his head would crash through the delicate walls of birch bark. Sometimes the spray dashed in stinging, like dust swept up from the prairie.

He wondered suddenly how far he had gone, whether he had already struck the white water, whether ahead of him loomed up Devil's Reef, like the teeth of a monster. It was inhuman to lie still, like a log, and not lift a paddle to steer clear of destruction. It was incredible. "God keep me blind," he whispered; "God keep me blind."

In an agony of torment he lay there. Finally all sensation seemed to go out of his body. "I have become a log," he thought, "for only a log can do this. The devil has turned me to wood." Then, finally, the woodenness crept to his brain. He had no sensation at all now, no emotion. What would happen if he could not move when he came to the smooth shallows of Grandes Forets? What would happen if he could never deliver his message? Suppose he had been struck dumb! And then, suddenly, all thought left him.

Rudi Agatin in a fishing boat trolling for pike, came across him. The canoe had been shot far out by the catapult force of the stream. Rudi Agatin had thought the canoe was a derelict thing, broken loose from some wharf in the village. Inside he had found a man, asleep it seemed; maybe dead. He towed the canoe to shore, very gently, and lifted the body within it. Johnny Gerald opened his eyes. It was hard to look against the sun, still he could see everything.

"Name of a name," gasped Rudi, "it is you!" Johnny Gerald sat up, and finally he stood. Rudi still looked at him as though he saw a ghost. "You have come down the devil's creek for the second time, and you are not dead."

No, he could see and move and breathe in the air of autumn. He was not dead. He started walking, slowly at first, and finally trotting. It was into great that had in it desperation. Like a madman he raced through the village. People stared at him as though he were crazy—or they were. At Jeanne Beaumont's cottage he slowed up and pushed open the gate. Jeanne Beaumont stood at the doorway.

"Johnny!" she called out. He stumbled to her side, and stopped then. "Johnny," she whispered, "Johnny."

She put her arms around him and drew him to her. "Speak to me once," she said. "Speak to me." Then she looked into his face. "You have come," she said, "with a message."

He nodded. "You have come by the creek. You are wet. You have come with a message. Something terrible." She stopped a moment, and then her lips said a word she had not even thought of. "Fire."

Again Johnny Gerald nodded. Suddenly she lifted her face, and the wind swept across it. Yes, it was a gale from the east, from the Tamarac country.

"You came to warn us to cross over the lake to the clearing."

"Johnny," she said, and her eyes held the gentleness of wisdom. "It was true what you told me once. You are a coward. But you are not a coward when it comes to the stories the men told of you before." She stopped a moment. "But no one but me can ever know how great, for you can never tell it—and I never shall."

(Copyright, 1923.)

Police Schools in Latin America

(Continued from First Page.)

a snappy appearing body of men and their plan of procedure is fashioned largely after that of the Canadians. They are equipped in somewhat the same manner. They are tireless riders and good shots, and many stories have been written of their daring deeds.

The "bobby" is an institution that belongs to London and nowhere in the world is another policeman like him. He is the most patient creature in the world. He will stand more chafing than any other guardian of the law, but he is careful that you do not step over the bounds of tradition, for if you do you have insulted the British empire, and that to him is sacred. He did not carry a revolver until of late and his equipment of gentlemen who have dined and voluted too much has always been that of a guardian brother.

Before the war the German police appeared and acted more like soldiers than cops. They were dressed in uniforms, and they carried rifles. They had no vision and knew but one book, that was their police manual. You could not explain, you could not do anything but come along unless you desired to have a lot more of them appear on the scene. The organization of the German police was so planned as to permit them at a moment's notice to take their place in the regular army.

IN OLD Paris the gendarmes wore capes, carried flat swords and made a million gesticulations while they took into custody some gay art student or some supposed criminal, and then there was endless questioning, while rooms of paper were used for resting places. All the facts meant all the facts literally. The police of the Paris of today are not what they used to be. They are more like those of this country—that is, somewhat more like them, but they retain some of the characteristics of ante-bellum days.

The Maori police of New Zealand have bills that are selected with the thought that one crack should put the offender hors-de-combat, if not actually kill him. They are an earnest of the happy days that appear to be the future of the world. A few hours afterward, while he was slipping coffee at one of the hotels, this friend and guide pointed to a waiter and asked if the American had ever seen that man before. Upon his saying that he did not recall ever having seen the man, the branches came heartily and informed the visitor that this was the detective they "had looked at that morning. In the matter of changing, without artificial means, the appearance, he was a wonder."

DOWN in the Dominican Republic they have a force of rural guards that numbers somewhere between 1,800 and 2,000 men. They are good policemen, are excellent horsemen, and are likewise proficient in the use of the bicycle. They are under continuous training, and from the ranks have risen many men who have given an excellent account of themselves in police work. They are called the guardia nacional, which, translated, means national guard.

The policeman who guard the Andes act as train guards and the majority of these men are of the keener type. In Bogota, Colombia, is another school that was founded in 1913, and this school is conducted under the direction of teachers from overseas. Perhaps the most interesting of all the police schools in the world is that at Sao Paulo, Brazil, for it is at this point that the aerial police are given instruction. There is an aviation school that would be a credit to the world where squadrons of fliers are trained for the police service. In this institution they have some of the best airmen in the world, and the Brazilian government, when it wants the services of teachers from overseas, calls on the police school.

In some parts of the Americas, the policemen still observe the old custom that came from Spain, namely, the crying out of the hour, and the call runs as follows: "Eleven (or whatever the hour happens to be) o'clock and all is serene." This cry is responsible for the name given to the policeman—"sereno."